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U.S. Papers Tell of '53 Policy to A-Bomb in Korea

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WASHINGTON, June 7 — Documents released today give details on a decision by President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Administration in 1953 to use atomic bombs in North Korea and Communist China, if necessary, to end the Korean War.

Once the armistice was achieved, on July 27, 1953, the Eisenhower Administration continued to define plans to use nuclear weapons if the Communists renewed the war, which the North Koreans started in 1950.

President Eisenhower took office in January 1953 after talks for a cease-fire had dragged on for two years and the war had settled into a standoff, with casualties being incurred but with no change in the front line, which today still separates North and South Korea.

The fact that the Eisenhower Administration was ready to use nuclear weapons is not new. President Eisenhower, in his memoirs, said he came into office prepared to use them, if necessary, to break the deadlock. What is new in the 2,000 pages of documents now made public is the high level of planning and the detail of discussion of possible use of these weapons, and Mr. Eisenhower's interest in overcoming reluctance to use them.

Truman Against Using the Bomb

His predecessor, Harry S. Truman, ruled out their use when the subject came up at two news conferences during his Administration.

Mr. Eisenhower, however, indicated readiness to use the weapons rather than face another debilitating war in Korea, according to a report of a National Security Council meeting on Dec. 3, 1953.

"The President expressed with great emphasis the opinion that if the Chi-

nese Communists attacked us again, we should certainly respond by hitting them hard and wherever it would hurt most, including Peiping itself," the record of the meeting says, using the former name of Peking.

"This," said the President, "would mean all-out war against Communist China," the document continues.

It is one of hundreds of papers, most of them originally classified as top secret, included in the State Department's latest volume in the series called "Foreign Relations of the United States." The volume, in two books, covers Korea from 1952 to 1954. The series is a source of primary material on American foreign policy.

Differences Between Aides Shown

The latest volume, in addition to discussing readiness to use nuclear weapons, discloses differences in approach between officials.

The discussion about the possible use of nuclear weapons in Korea was followed by a policy of threatening to use such weapons in case of a large-scale attack by the Soviet Union. There was also discussion in 1954 of possible American nuclear support to aid French forces besieged at Dienbienphu in the war that ended French rule in North Vietnam.

On Korea, President Eisenhower asked Adm. Arthur W. Radford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the December 1953 meeting whether he agreed that there would be a war with China if South Korea were attacked anew.

Admiral Radford said he did and added, "We would have to strike against the Communist Chinese in the air, from Shanghai all the way north."

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who agreed that the United States should not shrink from using atomic weapons, nevertheless was alarmed at the recommendation.

According to the record of the meeting, Mr. Dulles felt that "Admiral Radford's course of action contemplated general war with China and probably also with the Soviet Union because of the Sino-Soviet alliance."

Mr. Dulles said the State Department preferred to limit a nuclear attack to North Korea and to nearby troop concentrations. He also said he could accept a naval blockade of China and seizure of offshore islands.

His concern, he said, was not just that the Russians might enter the war, but that American allies would not support the United States.

Eventually, on Jan. 7, 1954, the State Department and the Joint Chiefs compromised by saying that in case of a resumption of hostilities, the United States should undertake "offensive air operations employing atomic weapons against military targets in Korea, and against those military targets in Manchuria and China which are being used by the Communists in direct support of their operations in Korea."

Nuclear Issue Came Up Twice

The nuclear issue arose twice in the Eisenhower Administration, the documents show. The first time was when Mr. Eisenhower, elected in 1952 on a pledge of ending the Korean War, expressed frustration at the drawn-out negotiations over a prisoner exchange, which, in turn, had delayed agreement on an armistice.

At a National Security Council meeting on Feb. 11, 1953, the record shows, Mr. Eisenhower, then in office less than a month, agreed with Mr. Dulles that "we could not go on the way we were indefinitely."

On March 27, 1953, at a subsequent meeting, they agreed "that somehow or other the taboo which surrounds the use of atomic weapons would have to be destroyed," the record says.

"While Secretary Dulles admitted that in the present state of world opinion, we could not use an A-bomb, we should make every effort now to dissipate this feeling," it says.

By May 13, 1953, the National Security Council was discussing a memorandum, designated NSC 147, which outlined six choices for ending military restraints, several of which involved ending the ban on bombing raids against China and increasing air attacks on North Korea.

Tactical Value Is Doubted

Several military men said they saw no particular tactical value in using atomic weapons in North Korea.

Gen. J. Lawton Collins, the Army Chief of Staff, said:

"Personally, I am very skeptical about the value of using atomic weapons tactically in Korea. The Communists are dug into positions in depth over a front of 150 miles."

He added that nuclear tests "proved that men can be very close to the explosion and not be hurt if they are well dug in."

President Eisenhower said he "thought it might be cheaper, dollar-wise, to use atomic weapons in Korea than to continue to use conventional weapons against the dugouts which honeycombed the hills along which the enemy forces were presently deployed."

On May 21, 1953, Mr. Dulles met in New Delhi with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and told him that, if the armistice negotiations failed, "the United States would probably make a stronger, rather than a lesser military exertion, and that this might well extend the area of conflict."